

RESEARCH BASED ASSESSMENT OF THE METHODS EMPLOYED BY ROMANIAN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS IN THE STAFFING PROCESS

*Alina CIOBANU*¹
*Armenia ANDRONICEANU*²

ABSTRACT

One of the main challenges faced by public organizations, in the current socio-economic context, is building and maintaining a capable and competitive workforce. Studies show that Romanian public institutions have to deal with high levels of employee fluctuation as large numbers of civil servants are leaving the public sector for better paid jobs in private companies. In addition, Romanian civil service has suffered significant changes along the last decade, in the context of the accession to the European Union. The actions aimed to transform the Romanian civil service into an efficient system have not always meet the initial expectations, mainly because the civil servants have not been prepared to face change, or to adapt to the new requirements by developing the necessary managerial skills and knowledge.

Our paper analyzes the recruitment and selection process in Romanian public institutions in order to identify main features of the staffing process in the public sector and to identify the aspects that influence civil servants satisfaction with their workplace. The research methods used to investigate the staffing process in public institutions and workplace motivation are document analysis and the survey.

The results of our research showed that further actions need to be undertaken by Romanian public institutions in order to transform the civil service staffing process into an efficient human resources activity. One of the main weaknesses of the staffing process has proved to be the planning phase, which is frequently performed in a formal and superficial manner.

KEYWORDS: *civil servants, human resources management, motivation, recruitment, staffing*

JEL CLASSIFICATION: *J24, J28, J45, J62, J81*

1. INTRODUCTION

In times of continuous change and globalisation, public sector management has to show the ability to produce the necessary change into the system that would bring about improved quality of the services provided to the population and broad participation of the citizens to the decision making process. The prerequisite condition to achieve these goals is modern public institutions characterised by competitiveness - the ability to retain the best people and absorb highly trained professionals, adaptability, resilience and creativity - the capacity to undertake and adapt best practices from the private sector in terms of organizational management and human resources management (Gheorghe, 2010).

The current economic and financial context, the necessity to cut down costs and increase productivity represent challenges that not only the public sector as an employer needs to face but also civil servants. Therefore, ensuring an efficient management by using modern methods,

¹ Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania, alinaaciobanu@gmail.com

² Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania, armenia.androniceanu@man.ase.ro

techniques and tools in the public management context have become preconditions for the development of performance analysis capacity, for increased job satisfaction and labour productivity in the public institutions (Nica, Popescu, 2010).

The aim of our paper is to analyse the mechanisms employed by public institutions to attract and retain highly skilled professionals into the public sector. Our analysis is based on the research conducted within several Romanian public institutions regarding the methods used in the staffing process, the criteria taken into consideration when planning and performing human resources recruitment and, finally, the factor that influence public personnel job satisfaction and determine their performance in the workplace.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND STATE OF ART

Berman et al. (2013) consider that only highly trained staff - the human capital - can help organizations develop and flourish in a time when operations become more complex and specific, while change produces increasingly faster. Specialists consider that recruitment is one of the most important activities of the human resources function as the higher the quality of candidates brought into the application process, the higher the probability that high quality candidates will also be brought into the organization (Hays & Sowa, 2010).

In line with other specialists, Llorens (2011) argues that organizations manage to attract numerous and highly trained applicants dispose of the opportunity to hire the best candidates. However, when performed without respecting certain rigors, recruitment can produce a negative impact on the other human resources activities too. Identifying the right person to fill a vacant position and, at the same time, going through the whole process in a more efficient way in terms of costs and time represent real challenges for public institutions (Davidson et al., 2007).

Previous research has shown that public institutions representatives consider that public organizations compete with the private sector ones in recruiting and attracting high-performing and productive workforce. The competition becomes even sharper when it comes to attracting and recruiting highly prepared personnel for specialized areas of activity (Davidson et al., 2007). Public institutions face real difficulties in recruiting the necessary personnel, especially in the critical areas. The constant pressure to do more with less resources results in assuming increasing responsibilities by employees which means additional tasks. In addition, the frequent reorganizations and staff reduction that take place in the public sector determine numerous competent civil servants to exit the system (OECD, 2001).

The European Commission (2011) considers that the EU member states are facing an important issue with respect to a high level of staff turnover in the public sector. The lack of consistent human resources and career development policies together with low salary levels determines highly prepared employees with valuable professional experience to exit the system.

Another challenge in the staffing area, reported by Berman et al. (2013), is related to the subject of this activity, the question being whether the process should focus on the candidate's current skills or their future potential. Traditionally, staffing emphasized technical skills and longevity while employees were expected to be professional, but not over-qualified. Nowadays candidates and future employees are expected to master certain skills and abilities, including communication skills and management concepts (Gheorghe, 2010) and the organizations are more and more concerned with an employee's potential.

Gheorghe (2010) considers that the professional training policy and the measurement of training performance represent other areas that need to be improved in the public sector and emphasizes that better training is likely to result not only in increased knowledge and increased decision autonomy for the civil servants but also in higher job motivation and consequently in improved performance and higher levels of staff retention. In a recent study, Ciobanu (2013) shows that public institutions of the Romanian central government need to significantly improve civil servants professional

training activity, especially concerning employees' training needs identification and professional training impact.

Androniceanu (2012) considers that further changes and improvements need to be performed in the human resources management system in order to develop a professional civil servants body. The author brings into discussion the importance of the part played by human resources managers within any institutions in helping employees identify the optimal direction for their professional development in order to achieve their career aspirations.

There are several aspects that influence the quality and efficiency of the recruitment process and ability of the organization to attract and retain high-performing and productive workforce, especially in the public sector where modern and innovative techniques have to be combined with the rigour of legislative provisions and European administrative principles. In our paper we will analyse the recruitment and selection process in Romanian public institutions in order to identify main features of the staffing process in the public sector and to identify the aspects that influence civil servants satisfaction with their workplace.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data presented in this paper is part of a wider in-progress study regarding human resources management and civil service in Romanian central and local government and was collected between the 1st of July and the 31st of August 2013.

The research was structured in two component parts, each of them addressed to a different group of individuals. The aim of designing this type of research was to collect information regarding the same topic from subjects occupying different positions in a public institution so that we would be able to create a complete picture regarding the analysed aspects.

3.1. Research objectives

We chose to conduct an analysis of the procedures implemented by Romanian public institutions in the area of personnel staffing. We were also interested to identify the most important motivational factors for public institutions employees, the factors that encourage them to continue their activity within the organization and motivate them to reach a certain performance level.

The objective of our research was to identify the current trends in the area of personnel staffing. Our analysis was founded upon the following elements: recruitment methods, areas of activity that lack specialised personnel, human resources recruitment planning, criteria taken into consideration when performing recruitment and selection activities, factors that influence civil servants' workplace satisfaction and performance level.

Our research started from the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. Public institutions tend to go from the traditional staffing procedures to methods that allow them to promptly answer institutional requirements

Hypothesis 2. Human resources recruitment planning in public institutions focuses mainly on current institutional needs and to a lesser extent on environmental changes and future tendencies

3.2. Research methods - description

The staffing process in public institutions was investigated in a direct way using qualitative research methods, during the data collection phase, which include document analysis and the survey.

In this stage, a series of documents were analyzed in order to achieve knowledge regarding current state on the studied topic: *The report regarding civil service and civil servants management in 2013*, recent studies on the analyzed matter, legislative and administrative measures in the area (Law no. 188/1999, Government Decision no. 611/2008) as well as best practices from other countries.

We designed two different questionnaires, each of them addressed to a certain sample. Each questionnaire contained 5 identification questions regarding respondent's position within the civil service, educational level, civil service seniority, area of activity, public institution dimension.

The first questionnaire was addressed to human resources specialists - management civil servants or persons that perform executive attributions in the area of human resources management. The questionnaire contains 22 questions out of which 7 are relevant for the issues discussed in the present paper. The research instrument contained the following types of questions: closed questions (4), 5 point scale type of questions (3) each of them containing 1, 4 respectively 6 items to be rated on a scale from 1 to 5.

The second questionnaire was addressed to civil servants, in general, persons who occupy either managerial, executive positions or who are civil servants with special attributions. The respondents were asked to rate on a scale from 1 to 5 how much the following 9 aspects influence their work performance such as professional training opportunities, the content of the performed activity, career development opportunities.

The questionnaires were distributed within institutions of central public administration, territorial agencies and local public administration, both in hard copies and in electronic format, using <https://docs.google.com> platform

3.3. Research sample structure

Two different research samples were designed.

The first research sample was built using a non-probabilistic sampling method - the judgemental sampling technique where the respondents are selected based on the argument that they represent the characteristics of the target group. In the first sample of our research were included experienced civil servants who know very well the civil service system and who either work in a human resources departments or occupy a public manager position within a public institution. 10 persons filled in this type of questionnaire.

The second sample of our research was built using the random sampling technique. Any available civil servant was invited to answer the questionnaire specially designed for this stage of the research. 58 civil servants answered this questionnaire.

5 of the persons who answered the first questionnaire are management civil servants while the other 5 persons occupy either an executive position or a specific civil service position within an human resources department. 7 persons work in a central public institution, 2 in local public administration and 1 in territorial administration. The respondents to our first research questionnaire are persons with significant seniority within the civil service, 8 of them having between 5 and 15 years of seniority in a civil service position. The other two persons have spent 1 to 5 years in a civil service position. All the questioned persons graduated post-secondary education - Bachelor level and 8 of them also graduated a Master' s program. 6 persons work in institutions with more than 301 employees, 3 persons work in institutions with 100 to 300 employees. As we can see, this sample of our research is constituted of highly prepared professionals, persons who are well acquainted with the civil service system and who can express a competent opinion regarding our research topic.

The 58 persons who filled in the questionnaire occupy either management positions (7%), executive positions (62%) or are civil servants with specific attributions in the human resources management area (31%). 53% of this category of respondents work within central public administration, 16% work within territorial administration and 31% work within local public administration. Other characteristics of the second sample are presented in Figure 1 below.

55% of our respondents work in a public institution with more than 301 employees, 25% work in a public institution with less than 100 employees while the other 20% work in a public institution with 101 to 300 employees. Their areas of activity are varied: budget, finance and public investments; public policy; human resources; European funds administration; organizational management etc.

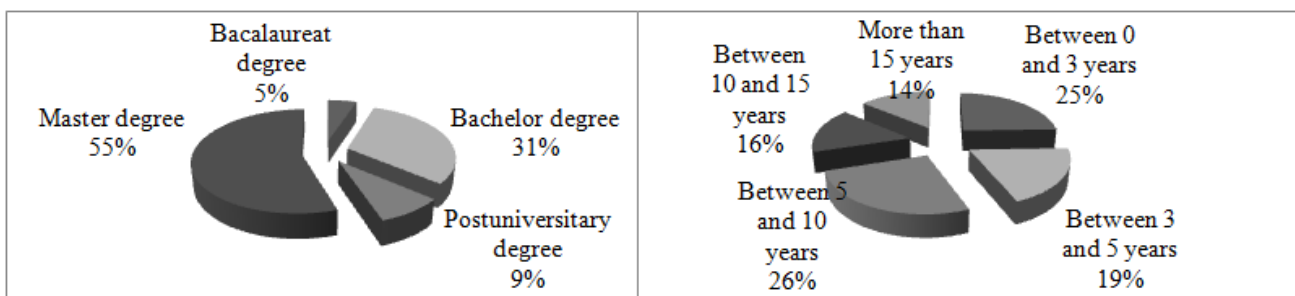


Figure 1. Characteristics of the respondents included in second sample of the research - details regarding the studies graduated and their civil service seniority

3.4. Results and analysis

The information collected using the two questionnaires was checked for accuracy, sorted, categorized and processed using the statistical program SPSS and the Microsoft Office Excel 2010.

3.4.1. Analysis of the responses received from the first sample

As shown above, the persons who answered our questionnaire are experienced civil servants whose main duties are strongly related to the area of human resources management. When asked how they would appreciate, on a scale from 1-no improvement to 5-significantly high improvement the evolution of civil servants professionalization level during the last 6 years, 7 persons consider that there has been no or very little improvement in civil servants professionalization during this period and only 3 persons consider that there has been some improvement in the civil servants professionalization level, while none of the questioned persons considers that a significant improvement has been achieved in this area.

We were interested to identify the methods most frequently used to occupy vacant positions within public institutions. Our respondents had the possibility to chose among the five response alternatives displayed in Figure 2 below: selection exams for permanent staff, selection exams for temporary staff, civil servants transfer from one public entity to another, seconded personnel and delegated personnel. Based on the responses received we have determined how frequent each of these methods is used. As we can see in Figure 2, the most frequently used staffing methods are "selection exams for temporary staff" (31.6%) and "civil servants transfer" (31.6%).

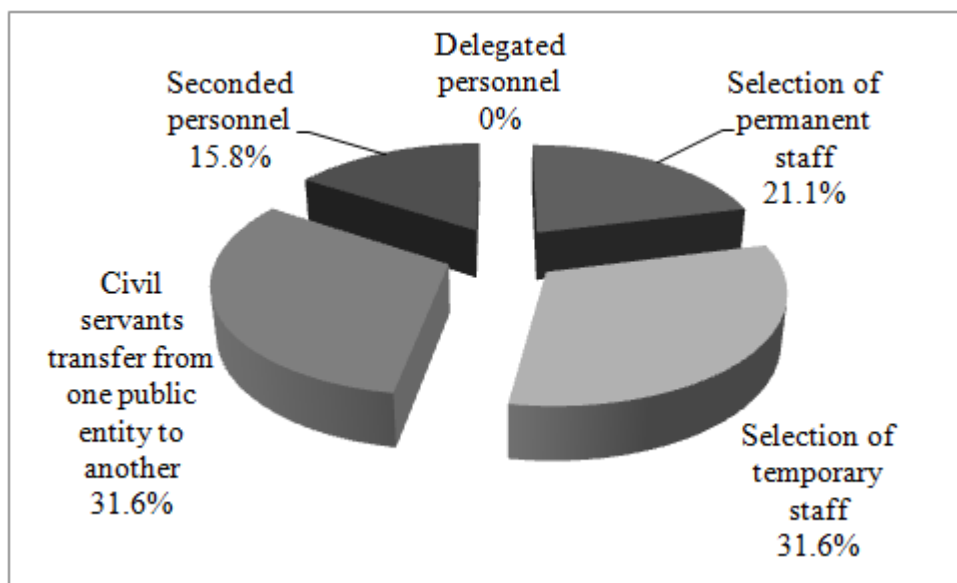


Figure 2. Staffing methods used by public institutions

Selection exams for permanent staff and civil servants transfer from one public institution to another are methods used to occupy a vacant position for an indefinite period while the other three methods: selection exams for temporary staff, secondment and delegation of personnel are methods used to temporarily fill in a position or to occupy a position that is temporarily vacant. The legal procedures that have to be performed in order to organize permanent staff selections must be undertaken with 45 days prior to the date of the contest, unlike 20 days prior the date of the contest when selection of temporary staff is organized.

The results of our research show that public institutions use either permanent staff recruitment methods or temporary staff recruitment methods similarly frequent. We can conclude that diversified means of personnel staffing are employed by public institutions. The first hypothesis of our research "public institutions tend to go from the traditional staffing procedures to methods that allow them to promptly answer institutional requirements" is confirmed as public institutions use not only selection exams in order to occupy vacant positions but are also using other methods such as personnel transfer and secondment - methods that allow vacant positions to be filled in faster.

All the questioned persons consider that public institutions face serious challenges in hiring and maintaining highly competent staff into the organization. 9 out of 10 respondents consider that the biggest challenge is attracting and recruiting highly prepared personnel, 70% of the respondents consider that public institutions face serious difficulties to maintain highly prepared professionals within the institution and 50% of the respondents consider that public institutions lack specialized personnel.

Based on the answers received from the human resources specialists, we determined the areas of activity in which public institutions lack specialized personnel. As shown in Figure 3, the questioned human resources specialists consider that public institutions need specialized personnel mainly in the area of IT&C (31%), followed by law, human resources and organizational management.

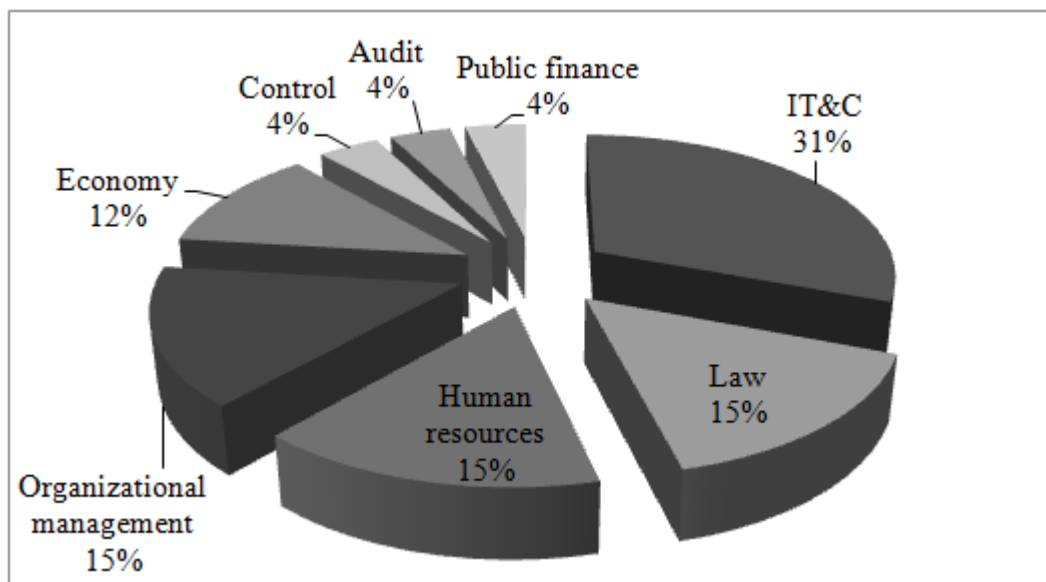


Figure 3. Areas of activity where public institutions lack specialized personnel

In order to better understand how staff employment process is being planned in public institutions, we questioned the human resources specialists regarding the most important aspects taken into consideration when performing this activity. Using a 5 point scale (1 – strongly disagree, 3 – moderately agree, 5 – strongly agree), we asked the respondents to express their agreement

regarding each of the following items: "When planning human resources recruitment process in the public sector, the following criteria are taken into consideration:

- 1) institutional performing and underperforming areas of activity;
- 2) recruiting specialists for the areas of activity that lack specialized personnel;
- 3) changes of the current and future workforce;
- 4) satisfying institutional future needs in order to consolidate the capacity to provide high quality public services."

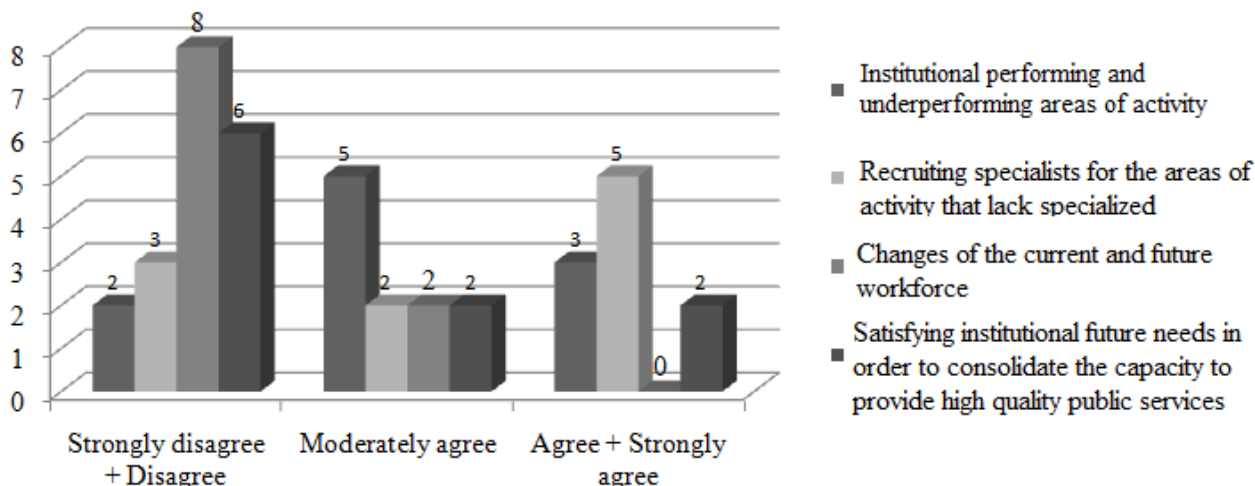


Figure 4. Criteria taken into consideration when planning human resources recruitment in the public sector

As presented in the figure above, the responses received show that aspects such as "changes of the current and future workforce" or "satisfying institutional future needs in order to consolidate the capacity to provide high quality public services" are rarely taken into consideration when setting up the human resources recruitment plan in Romanian public institutions. 8 out of the 10 questioned persons disagreed or strongly disagreed with the fact that "changes in the current and future workforce" represent a criterion taken into consideration in the planning phase of the recruitment process. Neither "future organizational needs" are paid more attention when planning human resources recruitment - 6 out of the 10 questioned persons disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

Instead, public institutions focus on including in their staffing plan "the recruitment of personnel for the areas of activity that, at the moment, lack the necessary specialists" - 50% of the questioned persons agreed and strongly agreed with this statement. Regarding the analysis of "institutional performing and underperforming areas of activity" when planning human resources recruitment, 50% of our respondents moderately agreed that this criteria is taken into consideration, while 30% of them agreed and strongly agreed that "institutional functional and non-functional areas of activity" are taken into consideration when planning human resources recruitment.

In order to find out specialists' opinion regarding the recruitment methodology currently used by public institutions, we asked our respondents to express their agreement (1 - strongly disagree, 3 - moderately agree, 5 - strongly agree) regarding the following statements:

- 1) The current recruitment and selection methodology provides the necessary framework to identify the most suitable persons for the vacant positions.
- 2) In the selection process, there is more emphasis laid on memorizing/retaining and reproducing ideas, methodologies or legislation fragments rather than on candidate's capacity to analyze, synthesize, interpret ideas or argument their point of view.

We received 6 valid responses that specialists either strongly disagree or disagree with the first statement, 3 respondents opted for the answer "moderately agree", and only one respondent agreed with the first statement. 7 respondents agreed that "there is more emphasis laid on memorizing/retaining and producing ideas, methodologies or legislation fragments rather than on candidate's capacity to analyze, synthesize, interpret ideas or argument their point of view" while 3 respondents have opted for the answer "moderately agree".

Based on the evaluation of these 2 statements by the questioned specialists, we can draw the conclusion that a certain dissatisfaction is manifested regarding the current recruitment and selection methodology as it does not provide the necessary framework to identify the most suitable candidates for a vacant positions and does not focus on appraising candidates' capacity to analyze, synthesize and interpret data or to argument a certain point of view. It rather focuses on their ability to memorize and reproduce ideas, methodologies or legislation fragments.

The conclusion that can be formulated based on the situation illustrated above is that planning human resources recruitment process in public institutions is focused on the current institutional needs. Romanian public institutions do not plan their human resources recruitment process on medium and long term. Future tendencies in the workforce evolution and future institutional needs are rather disregarded when planning human resources recruitment in a public institution. The second hypothesis of our research "Human resources recruitment planning in public institutions focuses mainly on current institutional needs and to a lesser extent on environmental changes and future tendencies" is confirmed.

3.4.2. Analysis of the responses received from the second sample

The purpose of conducting a survey on a larger sample (58 respondents from central, territorial and local public administration) has been to identify the factors that mostly influence civil servants' performance level. The questioned persons have been asked to evaluate to what extent certain factors (namely: the content of the performed activity, level of independence and responsibility, work environment and conditions, institutional impact on society, superior' s leadership style, salary level, professional training opportunities, career development opportunities, workplace safety) influence their performance in the workplace using a 5 point scale where 1 - no influence, 2 - minor influence, 3 - moderate influence, 4 - high influence 5 - very high influence.

Putting together the number of persons who have opted for the answers 4 - high influence 5 - very high influence, we determined the percentage of respondents whom are significantly influenced by the above mentioned factors. Figure 5 below shows that the following four factors influence significantly the performance level of a larger number civil servants: superior' s leadership style, work environment and conditions, the content of the performed activity, level of independence and responsibility.

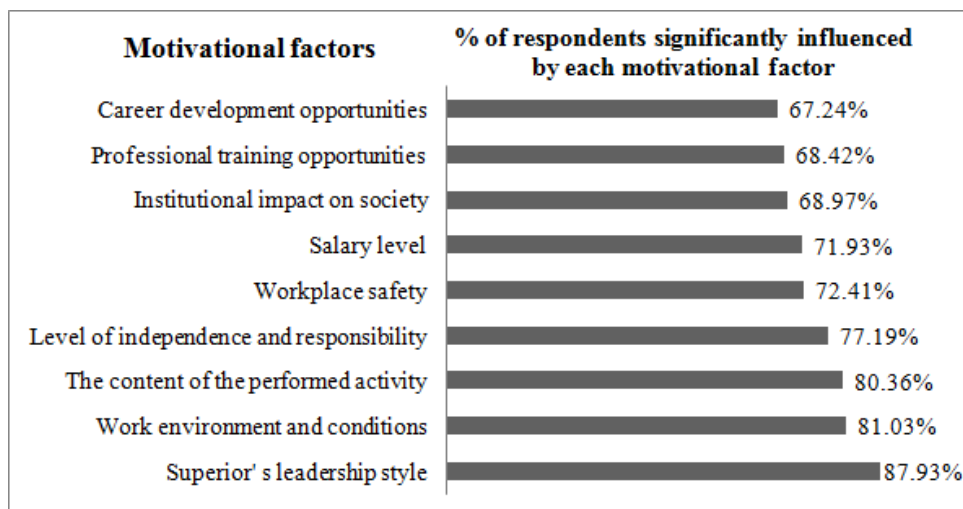


Figure 5. Factors that produce a significant influence on civil servants' performance level

If analysing the factors that influence the performance level of the civil servants who work in the Romanian central public administration (29 answers received from civil servants working at the central administrative level), we noticed that the percentage of persons whose performance level is influenced by the superior's leadership style slightly increases to 89.66% while the percentage of persons whose performance level is influenced by career development opportunities increases significantly compared to the above situation presented above reaching 72.41% and becomes the third most influential factor.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Significant improvements need to be undertaken in the area of human resources management in Romanian public institutions with respect to the personnel recruitment and retention. The impact of an inefficient staffing process is reflected upon employees' professionalization level, which is maintained at an unsatisfactory in the case of Romanian civil servants. The causes of this situation can be identified in the quality of the human resources management activities, in the efficiency and flexibility of the methods used to attract high-performing workforce, to retain skilled employees into public entities and to motivate them to attain their highest professional potential.

Romanian public institutions employ a variety of recruitment and staffing means to occupy the temporarily or permanent vacant positions, such as personnel transfer and secondment or selection exams. However, the access of a professional coming from the private sector or of a person who has not previously occupied a civil service position is possible only when selection exams are organized. The human resources specialists included into the first sample of our research expressed their dissatisfaction with the current recruitment and selection methodology as it does not provide the necessary framework to identify the most suitable candidates for the vacant positions. The difficult access to a civil service position in conjunction with a bureaucratic and obsolete recruitment and selection process deter individuals coming from outside the public sector from applying for a job in a public institution.

The severe shortage of specialized personnel in areas such as IT&C, law, human resources and organizational management as well as the serious difficulties encountered in attracting and retaining highly prepared professionals within public institution reside in the closed recruitment system. Furthermore, the lack of concern regarding the transformations of the external economic and social environment, the changes of the current and future workforce or long-term organizational needs, indicate a reactive approach in managing Romanian public sector institutions.

Building a competitive body of civil servants depends on open, transparent and efficient staffing process and on the capacity of public institutions management to direct their efforts towards transforming public institutions into attractive employers. During a period when individuals prepared to undertake all sorts of tasks represent valuable assets for the organization, public employers should pay more attention to creating an appropriate work environment that would enhance civil servants' commitment to the organization and motivation to reach higher performance standards.

The aim of our paper has been to bring into academic discussion the problems public institutions face in attracting and retaining highly trained personnel and how this situation might influence the overall performance of public organizations. However we cannot draw conclusions regarding the functioning of the recruitment and staffing process in Romanian public institutions, in general, given the limited sample of our research, which is why we consider that further theoretical and empirical research should be undertaken.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This paper was co-financed from the European Social Fund, through the Sectorial Operational Programme Human Resources Development 2007-2013, project number POSDRU/159/1.5/S/138907 "Excellence in scientific interdisciplinary research, doctoral and postdoctoral, in the economic, social and medical fields -EXCELIS", coordinator The Bucharest University of Economic Studies

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